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Amoamo, M.

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(Re)thinking Māori Tourism: the third space of hybridity

Maria Amoamo

Abstract

This commentary reflects on the salience of hybridity as a theoretical tool in postcolonial studies. It argues that embedded paradigms such as colonised /coloniser and binary constructs Self/Other become subject to disruptive conjuncture through processes of hybridization and third space enunciation. It seeks to (re)think Māori Tourism as residing in third space inbetween spaces”and renegotiates the articulation of cultural production in a tourism context. Māori Tourism is therefore better understood in terms of cultural engagement that is performatively produced, historically informed, and transformed as new signs of identity.

Introduction

The accelerated pace of tourism studies in the past few years has shifted the broader context of ‘cultural tourism’ to a more complex and fractured domain when describing cultural experiences within the processes of tourism development. As such, cultural tourism has become a vast terrain of creative pursuits, and the perceptions and expressions of culture vary greatly (Smith 2009: 3). Moreover, this reflects the notion that tourism (as a field) is inherently an area of contestation which routinely contains a healthy multiplicity of outlooks on nature, heritage, and culture (Hollinshead 2010: 501). Cultural theorists tend to adopt a plural concept of culture that recognises the diversity and hybridity of different cultures (see Clifford, 1988; Friedman, 1994; Hall, 1997). This is illustrated by Robert Young (1995: 30) who states, ‘...the genealogy of the concept of ‘culture’ shows that it does not so much progress as constantly reform itself around conflictual divisions, participating in, and always a part of, a complex, hybridised economy’. The importance of hybridity is ‘...not to be able to trace two original movements from which the third emerges rather hybridity...is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (Bhabha 1994: 211). Hence, this commentary urges tourism researchers to embrace and engage in ‘multiple voices’ (Sampson, 1993: 125) if the discipline of tourist studies is to more fully understand new emerging forms of meaning making.

(Re)thinking Māori Tourism

When I commenced doctorate studies I advocated my research sat within the broader context of cultural tourism in which to discuss problematic issues of indigenous identity. As such, I chose to examine the representation of Māori Tourism within a postcolonial framework (see Amoamo 2009). Discourse framed within postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct, de-contextualise and liberate culture *per se* from the grand narratives of the past; becoming increasingly politicised, especially where it is defined as a way of life of a people or society. It is precisely the scope and speed of change in cultural tourism studies that urges me to re-think *what is* Māori Tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Is Māori tourism representative of what is defined/termed indigenous tourism and indeed, how do we now define indigenous tourism? Terminology is an evolving entity. Butler and Hinch (2007) use the umbrella term 'indigenous' to describe tourism whereby tourists visit local people in their natural habitat, also referred to as 'ethnic', 'tribal', 'native' or 'Aboriginal'. Indigenous peoples are described as being distinct in terms of their culture and identity relative to dominant groups in society. Arguably, this description applies to Māori, the New Zealand Māori are a minority population, a tribal people with a language and culture distinct from the majority population often referred to as Pākehā (of European descent).

However, there are further distinctions made between indigenous cultural tourism and ethnic cultural tourism according to Smith (2009). The former refers to the lifestyles and traditions of tribal groups living within fragile and remote environments (e.g. Papua New Guinea, hill tribes in Northern Thailand) often in postcolonial developing countries and in their natural environment. The latter refers to the arts and culture of ethnic minority groups, immigrants and diasporas living largely within post-imperial Western societies. Consequently, Smith (2009) groups New Zealand with Australia, North America and Hawaii as places of 'cultural heritage tourism' in her typology of indigenous cultural tourism and the kinds of activities offered to tourists. However, while I agree with Smith the simplicity of this grouping does not recognise the complexities of cultural tourism experiences, and indeed the diversity offered by each of these (post)colonial cultures.

Such distinctions also prompt me to re-think Māori tourism in the wider domain of closely scripted dialogues indigenous/cultural/ethnic tourism and how such placement reflects the social, cultural, economic and political environment within

which it resides. I advocate a more open-to-the-future dialogue that recognises multisited/mobile relationships of self-making and self questioning of identity (Hollinshead, 2010). A fundamental form of Māori indigeneity is that of diverse localized groups, each recognisable as *tangata whenua* (people of the land). To be *tangata whenua*, indigenous or local, however was not to be fixed and bounded in a place (Harvey 2005).

Movement and mobility were inherent traits of Māori social, political and economic survival strategies pre-colonial and post-colonial. Encounters with other Māori in trade, marriage and conflict resulted in complex networks of relationship between different *iwi* (tribe), *hapu* (sub-tribe) and *whanau* (family group). Thus, Māori indigeneity has always been envisaged as a dialogue between location and movement (Harvey 2005: 132). Māori were quick to accept Western ways as new technologies were adapted and interpreted within the Māori frame of reference and cultural needs. This was not necessarily conversion, but Māori incorporating new practices into their culture. Such organic hybridisation does not disrupt the sense of order and continuity; new objects are integrated into language or culture unconsciously. Cultural adaptation involves a process of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation; a double movement that reflects the dialectic of hybridity.

The *Third Space* of Hybridity

The aim of this commentary is therefore to reflect on the salience of *hybridity* as a theoretical tool in postcolonial studies. The applied relevance for tourism studies is a more nuanced understanding of the mutual but difficult proximities of cultures and cultural difference. That is, it prompts a re-examination of what is invested in positioning the self and other as dialectically essentialised cultures in the postcolonial context. I draw on the contribution Homi Bhabha (1994) has made to cultural theoretical thought on historical and temporal forms of ethnicity under the postcolonial moment. Bhabha's insights stress the discontinuous nature of the location of emergent cultures/ethnicities or, "*third space cultures*", where new identities and affinities are restlessly forming. This restlessness forces tourism studies, for instance, to reconceptualise essentialised categorisations and thus, to regard and debate 'culture' in terms of the possible situations, responses, outcomes and consequences of hybridisation (Amoamo 2011). It is not 'hybridity' as such, but

instead the *processes* of hybridisation through which “third spaces” emerge. In short the hybrid opens up a new category of cultural location.

Findings from my doctorate studies revealed that Māori tourism is not a homogenous entity and that products offered by Māori tourism operators reflect the multiplicity of Māori culture. Multi-layered narratives underpin both traditional and contemporary approaches to representing Māori culture and thus intersect with the concept of *hybridity*. Attention to hybridity exposes the layers of cultural identity and diverse nature of Māori tourism. Bhabha (1994, p. 2) states, “this does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority”. The identity of Māori has been somewhat shaped by stereotypical images that have tended to fix Māori culture in a temporal/interstitial zone of ‘traditionalised’ representative of pre-colonial times (Ryan 1999, Taylor 1998). In Many of New Zealand’s offshore tourism marketing campaigns, a somewhat homogenous representation of Māori culture has constructed an identity that is at odds with the diverse reality that makes up such ethnic groups.

My research analysis reveals Māori are increasingly informing control of their tourism representation and thus undermine the “authenticities” previously provided by a Pākeha-dominated industry through performative practice that reinscribes notions of the Other and (re)presents Māori tourism within different discursive frames that resist homogenisation. Thus, Māori tourism operators renegotiate previously ‘bounded’ cultural identities as perpetuated by tourism imagery enunciated through personal, tribal and collective narratives. As postcolonial agents, Māori seek to redress the social, cultural and political domination of colonial practice in Aotearoa New Zealand achieved through new discursive frameworks of “third space”. Third space moves beyond enduring hierarchies of colonial knowing and imperial ideology towards “a fresh and previously unencountered interstitial space of cultural meaning” (Hollinshead 2010: 506). Moreover, it falls into a sort of ‘inbetweenness’ of already mapped colonising understandings and those half-mapped and less privileged understandings yet to be fully perceived and registered.

Research findings also revealed most Māori tourism operators agreed that the representation of Māori needed change to reflect more contemporary images, and that Māori were a ‘living, breathing culture’ that ascribed rich regional distinctions through tribal (and thus regional) differences. Many operators identified with ‘hybrid’

identities (i.e. genealogy of mixed *iwi/hapu* identity and Pākehā identity). The ability to traverse both Māori and Pākehā cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate both sameness and difference creates a hybrid subject position. From a postmodern perspective we therefore need to assess how 'culture' and 'ethnicity' are dynamically produced, reproduced and transformed. As Hollinshead states:

the practice of culture and the representation of ethnicity are not so much things which are mechanically reproducible from a set of thoughts and traditions made resolutely and unchangeably available to a given population overtime, rather it is a *lived* (rather than a *formerly learned*) mix of postures, movements, and actions through which these aggregating individuals tacitly express themselves given the temporal (rather than the historical) constraints they face at any point (1998:123).

Hence, tribal distinctions are key elements to variation of the Māori tourism product; points of difference are related to regional resources and how Māori tourism operators translate and interpret these to visitors. This can operate through its own projected and *performative* storylines. Carlson (1996) suggests that cultural performance can allow marginalised groups to explore relationships between self and society, as well as issues relating to objectification and identity. Thus, hybridised identities are deemed positive on the grounds that they disrupt the binary opposition between western and native subjects, or colonised and coloniser (Bell 2004).

New Directions for Māori Tourism

I now turn to Hollinshead's contribution to tourism studies (1998, 2010) as a benchmark for contemporary cultural change and the role of tourism. Hollinshead's review in *Tourism Analysis* titled 'Tourism Studies and Confined Understanding: the call for a "new sense" postdisciplinary imaginary' challenges tourism academia toward more flexible forms of understanding in our interpolation and critique of the '...often difficult-to-distill identifications and the new-register aspirations of populations today – notably those in ambiguous/hybrid postcolonial settings' (Hollinshead 2010: 500). I take up this challenge by (re)thinking Māori tourism from notions of old sense interpretations to those of new sense. In order to achieve this my research will focus on the constructionist and semiotic understanding of identity as relational that shape the performance of tourism encounters between host (Māori)

and visitor. That is, the construction of identity arising from kinship. I propose to achieve this through a project titled 'Increasing Investment in Māori Tourism: The Economic Value of Identity'. This project will examine the development of Ngāi Tahu tourism: Ngāi Tahu are the Māori people of the southern islands of New Zealand - Te Waipounamu and hold tribal authority to over 80 per cent of the South Island (www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz).

The methodological approach of social-valuing will underpin this research. Social valuing recognises that local communities hold extensive knowledge about places and an exposure to this knowledge can play a key role in the tourist experience, provided of course that the locals are in control of the interpretation and transmission of this knowledge. As a result, this enables tourists to transcend the Otherness implied and represented in many tourism marketing images as promoted by the 'cultural brokers' of the industry. Keeping pace with consumer demand and changing motivations means constructing a vast array of cultural and experiential tourism experiences that more readily admit the heterogeneity and the hybridity of cultural, material and spatial repertoires within which tourism operates.

Concluding Comments

What we can draw from Bhabha's insights into cultural production is that for indigenous peoples tourism can become a site of resistance and redress to colonial practice, a medium through which they can creatively re-invent themselves through performative acts and within newly identified political-geographic spaces and to contest mainstream or established delineations of them. Tourism thus becomes a profusive field of enquiry into proclamations of imagined or corrective racial/ethnic/cultural Selfhood (Hollinshead 1998) through which we can examine the concept of hybridity. The cultural malleability of Māori pre and post colonialism reveals Māori culture as an imaginative process that has '...harnessed tourism as a highly performative medium' (Hollinshead 1998: 50) and as a site to project new and open articulations of identity. As social actors, Māori take up the discourses of the present and the past to create multiple identities; the past is reconstituted, revisited and realised in partial, incomplete ways. Through the negotiation and renegotiation of third spaces the other is not so much negated but re-positioned. This seeks to not totalise the experiences of the world's peoples but provide an open-ended outlook

through the fluidity of ways of being. Thus, Bhabha implies that *all* individuals within mainstream societies can indeed also be caste in *interstitial zones* of stereotyped being or misunderstood living. The value for tourism researchers and indeed tourism practitioners is to see past fixed worldviews to view populations *differently* in their own various times of the now. Such plurality of thought can only benefit the tourism experience through enriched outlooks on cultural orientations that resist discursive disclosure. This commentary contends tourism studies must seek to probe the emergent identities using concepts such as hybridity; to reveal the ambivalences and ambiguities of the new in-between forms of culture and difference that are cultivated through the presentations and the performances of tourism.

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Author details: Maria Amoamo is currently Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Otago, New Zealand

Email: maria.amoamo@otago.ac.nz

